

Clark County Board of Freeholders

Draft Outreach Plan: Initial proposal for home rule charter

Situation

The Board of Freeholders has reached consensus on the elements of a home rule charter. Before formally placing a home rule charter on the ballot for voter consideration, the freeholders would like to discuss their initial plans for the charter with county citizens and seek their feedback. Citizen feedback could result in possible changes to the proposed charter; on the other hand, feedback could show that the public is comfortable with the home rule charter as it is currently drafted.

Goals

- Generate visibility for the home rule charter process.
- Foster understanding of the draft charter and what it means to county government.
- Obtain feedback from the public on the draft proposal and its main elements.

Outreach components

Main messages

A communications program built on strong themes is more efficient and effective than one with unrelated and scattered messages.

- Identify three main messages. These are “big picture” messages rather than detailed information. State each one in a single sentence in language that the average citizen can understand and relate to.
- All the freeholders’ communications efforts should reflect these main messages and, ideally, should articulate them as the single sentences above.

Community meetings/town halls

- Conduct five evening meetings/town halls (7 – 8:30 p.m.), targeting March 18 - 27, in the following general locations:
 - Ridgefield/La Center
 - Amboy/Yacolt
 - Battle Ground
 - Camas/Washougal
 - Vancouver
- Conduct a meeting/town hall on Saturday, March 23, in a central location such as the Orchards area.
- Aim for about 10 freeholders at each meeting. Freeholders designate which meetings they will attend.
- Determine speakers’ roles based on who signs up to attend.
- Practice. Presentation should take no more than 30 minutes, and less would be better still. Make sure you can say what you want to say in that time frame; if not, rework until you can.
- Provide comment/straw poll card to everyone who attends (See *comment cards* below.)
- *Option:* In promotional materials, state that children are welcome. Establish a kids’ corner. Hire high school or college-age students to supervise.

Speakers bureau (The speakers bureau can be ongoing. This recommendation focuses on needs prior to the end of the comment period for this specific phase.)

- Begin making presentations as soon as written materials are available (see *hand-outs* below). Aim for February 20 – March 30. (This time frame allows two freeholder meetings to develop and approve written materials. Presentations can take place without written materials, but using them helps promote consistent information and messages; people generally like to see something in writing. At a minimum, the comment/straw poll cards need to be available.)
- Develop an outline for the presentations. It can be similar to the presentations for meetings/town halls. This is not a script, but it ensures that all groups are hearing basically the same thing.
- Each presentation should take approximately 20 minutes, with plenty of time left for questions and input. This may need to be modified depending on time available.
- Freeholders each identify groups they are associated with or have some sort of a connection to (e.g., a friend or colleague is a member). They contact those groups and set up presentations. (If each freeholder speaks to just one group, you’ll have spoken to 21 groups.)
- Request time on agenda of Neighborhood Advisory Committee of Clark County and the Vancouver Neighborhood Alliance (umbrella groups for neighborhood leaders).

- *Optional:* Write letter requesting speaking engagement to groups likely to be interested: League of Women Voters, granges, etc. (*Question:* What will you do if you're successful? How many presentations are freeholders willing/able to make during this time period?)
- Two freeholders attend each speaking engagement. There is a better dynamic and more energy than with a single speaker; it's especially helpful when responding to questions.
- At end of each speaking engagement, collect comment/straw poll cards.
- Establish calendar and list, including speakers, to keep track of progress. This will be helpful during the next phase.

Party caucuses

- Identify freeholders to approach parties to ask for opportunity to present questions.
- Ask identical questions as on comment/straw poll card.

News releases (to all local media)

- Week of Feb 18 for publication/article week of Feb 25: Freeholders seeking input on draft proposal. List the places the draft and executive summary are available (Internet, libraries, city halls, by calling the county); the ways people can obtain additional information (speakers bureau, web site, CVTV call-in); opportunities for input (web survey, attending meetings); highlight meeting schedule; identify end of comment period for this phase. *Designate freeholder(s) to follow up with specific reporters.*
- Week of Feb 25 for publication/article week of March 4 (if call-in show is March 10; if show is March 17, move other dates one week later): Find out more about draft charter proposal at call-in show; ask questions, share opinions and ideas. Repeat places information is available, etc.
- Week of March 4 for publication/article week of March 11: Focus on meetings/town halls; remind about web site for documents and survey. *Designate freeholder(s) to follow up with specific reporters.*
- If the revised web site is completed in time, send out news release saying it's new and improved and reminding people about survey.

Editorial board meetings (alternative: written opinion piece from freeholders)

- Set up appointments with editors of The Columbian and the weekly newspapers for the first week in March.
- Identify two representatives to meet with each newspaper.
- Take written materials. Be specific that freeholders are asking for any assistance they can give in getting the word out to the public about these meetings.

Ads (Columbian, Reflector, Post-Record—optional: Oregonian, Daily News)

- For week of Feb 25: We want to hear from you (survey, call-in, meetings/town halls) or big ad with everything.
- March 10 (or 17), just in Columbian: Call-in on CVTV.
- For week of March 11: Find out more, tell us what you think (meetings, survey)

Internet

- Put survey on-line by Feb 25. Include a brief introduction that lets people know the survey questions relate to key decisions under consideration. The survey will be identical to the comment/straw poll card.
- *In addition to materials currently on site, also include:*
--Draft charter and executive summary.
--Copies of hand-outs provided at meetings/town halls.

Written materials in other locations

- Obtain approval and make arrangements to provide written materials to libraries, city halls, county reception areas, etc.
- Provide materials to established locations no later than week of February 25.
- Provide materials in web format no later than February 25.

Newsletter information

- Write one to two brief paragraphs discussing the charter and inviting people to attend the meetings/town halls. Generate mailing list. Send to neighborhood associations and other organizations with the request that they include them in their newsletters.

- Same written material can also be sent to major employers that have internal communications tools.

Public service announcement on CVTV

- Work with CVTV to develop script for 30- to 60-second PSA inviting citizens to attend meetings.
- Determine spokesperson; work with CVTV to tape segment.
- Air segment beginning last week in February or first week in March.
- (Note: CVTV will also air the meeting schedule on its reader board.)

Call-in show on CVTV

- March 10 or 17, preferably 10th; 7 p.m. for ½ - 1 hour.
- Determine who will moderate; identify 3 more freeholders to serve as panel.
- Develop introduction, similar presentation as at meetings/town halls.
- Decide who does/says what.
- Develop discussion topics in case calls are infrequent.

Main points of presentation

- What charter is and, broadly, the important things freeholders think it will accomplish.
- Background on how freeholders got to this point, how decisions were made (lots of education, lots of discussion, consensus—some disagree on some points).
- Freeholders' decision to make limited number of changes in current situation, based on understanding that additional changes can be made in the future.
- What happens next.
- Key elements and why.
- Ideas that went off the table this time around.
- Q and A.
- Request to complete comment/straw poll card.

Hand-outs for meetings/town halls and speakers bureau presentations

In addition to current fact sheet, develop the following materials:

- Draft home rule charter.
- Executive summary of charter.
- For each element of the charter that freeholders believe is important, state the proposal and, in bulleted format, list three to five reasons that support it.
- For each element that had significant discussion/support but that ultimately was not included in the charter proposal, state it and, in bulleted format, list three to five reasons that support it and three to five reasons that it was not included at this time.
- List of freeholders and a way they can be contacted.
- Simple evaluation form about meeting/presentation overall. Include open-ended question about how presentation or materials could have been more helpful. Use feedback to modify future presentations.

Comment/straw poll card

- Color code for meetings/town halls; speakers bureau; political caucuses.
- Ask the following:
 - Should a home rule charter:
 - Increase number of commissioners from 3 to 5: yes/no
 - Elect commissioners by geographic district rather than countywide: yes/no
 - Designate positions as nonpartisan instead of affiliated with political parties: yes/no
 - Include the initiative option allowing citizens to propose new laws to voters at the county level: yes/no
 - Include the referendum option allowing citizens to challenge laws adopted at the county level: yes/no
 - Should getting an initiative or referendum on the ballot be:
very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult
 - Are you in favor of a home rule charter for Clark County: yes/no
 - Anything that you'd change?
 - Anything that you'd add?
 - Any other comments?